

Appendix B - Lee Highway Corridor

[Following is the entire “Report to the Planning Commission” of the Highway 50 Corridor Task Force, delivered October 15, 2003.]

The Lee Highway Corridor is the economic heart of the City of Fairfax. As such, the corridor’s vitality is essential to the continued stability of the City’s tax base. The time is right to anticipate the future by developing and implementing a multi-faceted approach that encourages the corridor’s revitalization.

External studies emphasize that the City is at a point where active revitalization must occur. Commercial centers and businesses are being overtaken by newer developments in Fairfax County. The City’s businesses cannot compete with modern “big-box” and upscale retail developments. Existing office space does not offer the amenities expected by today’s workforce.

The strong market demographics of our geographic area indicate that development will continue in the future, unevenly but with continuing concentration. The issue that the City faces is not whether development will occur, but rather, the type and pace of that development. The question becomes: “Will development in the City be of the type and structure that produces the desired image and future tax revenues that are in the best interests of the City?”

If the City desires revitalization and development that enhances the City’s image, it is important to establish standards that facilitate desired development. A laissez-faire approach will lead to continuing decline of some properties and a hodge-podge of structural images, leading in turn to a lessened perception of the economic value of the businesses in the City. ‘Standards’ need to be set ahead of the inevitable development, rather than in reaction to it.

Six (6) goals have been established by the Task Force that are designed to encourage an invigorated business environment along the corridor as well as bolster a greater degree of economic intensity:

- Encourage redevelopment of older/ poorly developed parcels.
- Encourage improvement of properties that contribute to ambience.

- Facilitate (directly or indirectly) the accumulation of parcels.
- Improve the corridor’s “streetscape.”
- Maintain or improve the efficiency of the corridor’s traffic flow.
- Increase the City’s tax base and annual revenue.

The initial step is a definition of the geographic area that will be the subject of the City’s revitalization efforts. Referring to the EDAW study in February 1999, the following five contiguous areas are broadly defined:

Kamp Washington Node: The area bounded by the west City Limits through the Kamp Washington traffic signal.

Northfax Node: The area between McLean Avenue and Eaton Place on both sides of Lee Highway. Warwick Avenue is the southern boundary and the north City Limits is the northern limit.

Fairfax Circle Node: The area from the east corporate City Limits to Accotink Creek on the west and south. The north boundary is the corporate City Limit.

West Connector: The area on either side of Routes 50/29 between the Northfax Node (McLean Avenue) and the Kamp Washington Node.

East Connector: The area on either side of Routes 50/29 between the Northfax Node (Eaton Place) to the Fairfax Circle Node (Accotink Creek crossing).

To encourage a broad based revitalization and development effort along the corridor in the four, separately identified areas, the Task Force proposes the following Implementing Framework for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan.

Project Promotion and Civic Relations

- Create and foster an overall atmosphere in the City that encourages development and revitalization throughout the District.

- Develop special approaches to deal with *in situ* businesses.
- Encourage and support the creation of a District Business Association.
- Improve the use of City authorities and commissions to achieve results.
- Advocate general sector revitalization and development preferences to shape market forces. Proposals for special sector considerations are:

Kamp Washington Node: designate for an “integrated mixed-use project.”

Northfax Node: designate for an “integrated mixed-use project.”

Fairfax Circle Node: designate for increased office space, concentrating on trade associations and enterprises that are technical in orientation.

West Connector: designate for upscale retail developments through parcel consolidation.

East Connector: designate for a higher degree of streetscape and public space taking advantage of Accotink Creek and City-owned parcels.

- Discourage activities that lead to non-adaptive reuse of facilities, second tier use, deteriorating, unlandscaped anterior parking facilities and inappropriate signage.

Planning Policy and Practice

- Encourage upscale mixed use and residential developments within selected sectors of the District.
- Implement new planning and code approaches for development in lieu of FAR as a primary consideration. The new approaches could include some or all of the following: form based planning, angle of bulk plane requirements, maximum and minimum building restriction lines, and tying building heights to parcel topography.
- Employ discretionary land use actions, such as Special Use Permits, Special Exceptions and BAR review only in cases involving substantial traffic or urban design problems
- Encourage all development / redevelopment in the District to meet architectural criteria to create a quality ‘feel and look’ while maintaining flexibility to avoid a homogeneous appearance.
- Establish a unified standard for District streetscapes to ensure a consistent ‘public’ look.

- Permit greater relative structure heights in the nodes that do not abut residential developments.
- Encourage site plans that alleviate the visual impact of parked cars and maximize the use of available parking space.
- Provide ‘credits’ for standards modification to achieve desired results.
- Streamline the developer approval process
- Continue to address the environmental constraints of the flood plain issues in the Northfax and Fairfax Circle nodes and the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act.
- Delegate responsibility for project implementation to a dedicated executive reporting to the appropriate City oversight authority.

City Services

- Operate a Cue bus loop within the District.
- Consider dedicated Cue bus routes between new major office developments and the Vienna/Fairfax Metro station.
- Consider regulating deliveries within the District to minimize traffic disruption.

Fiscal Policy

- Establish a Lee Highway Business District and a District tax policy that supports the Task Force’s Vision Statement
- Assist with the financial aspects of new development and revitalization that could include some or all of the following: supplemental tax, a business renaissance loan program, EDA bond financing, grants, and tax abatements.

Highway 50 Corridor Task Force

The Task Force was created to aggregate initiatives to achieve the goals of revitalizing the economic viability of the District while enhancing, where possible, the ambiance and “small-town” appeal of the City of Fairfax. Members of the Task Force and the expanded working group are as follows:

Task Force:

Chairman:

Dale Lestina

Chair, Economic Development Authority

Members:

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Summary

The Task Force’s Implementing Framework was developed as a *comprehensive approach* for moving revitalization activity forward. Regeneration and new development along the Highway 50 Corridor will, however, require a comprehensive effort of large and small actions that, in the aggregate, are necessary to achieve the stated goals.

Revitalization of the Highway 50 Corridor requires consistency and constancy over a long number of years through economic cycles, municipal elections and regulatory changes. Achieving revitalization’s goals will not be an effortless labor, but the corridor’s economic vitality and tax revenues are essential for a continued high level of City services. The Task Force urges that the effort commence to revitalize our primary economic artery in a manner that sets our City apart in a positive way.

The Task Force recommends that efforts to improve the ‘streetscape’ of Lee Highway commence as soon as possible. Such activity could occur readily in both the western portion of the Northfax Node (west of the Route 123 intersection) and the West Connector. The timing of ‘streetscape’ activities could be tied to the Highway 50 Revitalization announcement and would also act as a signal of the commitment to the project from the City and the EDA.

The future economic health of the City of Fairfax will be determined, in large measure, by our energy and commitment to the revitalization of the Highway 50 Corridor. The Task Force respectfully requests favorable consideration that the foregoing Implementing Framework for the Highway 50 Corridor revitalization will be incorporated into the Planning Commission’s 2003 Comprehensive Plan.

